

**STATEMENT OF
JAMES L. CONNAUGHTON, CHAIRMAN
WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY POLICY,
NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
ELEVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
TO CABINET STATUS
SEPTEMBER 9, 2003**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee again today to discuss the Bush Administration's support for elevating the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to a cabinet department. I am pleased to share this panel with my colleague, Acting EPA Administrator Marianne Horinko.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon created a small independent agency to take on the responsibility to "effectively ensure the protection, development, and enhancement of the total environment."

Over thirty years later, the United States Environmental Protection Agency has a long record of accomplishment in advancing that mandate. Because of these accomplishments, environmental quality in the United States has vastly improved.

Improved air quality is one of our nation's greatest environmental successes. Air pollutants have been reduced by almost one-third since 1970, even as the nation's gross domestic product increased 160 percent, energy consumption increased 45 percent, and population increased 38 percent. Airborne lead, the most dangerous air pollutant, has been cut 97 percent. And in the last decade alone, nitrogen oxide emissions are down 60 percent in the 12 eastern states most negatively impacted before.

The nation's water is cleaner. Today, 192 million people are served by modern sewage treatment facilities. Our Clean Water Act ensures that seven hundred *billion* pounds of pollutants are not discharged into our waters each year. In the last decade alone, we have provided safe drinking water to another 54 million Americans.

The nation's land is better protected, and we are more able to provide benefit and refuge to our communities and support thriving ecosystems. Land protection activities that focus on prevention, control, conservation, natural resource management, and cleanup are an ongoing priority.

The general health of the American public is good and improving. People are living longer than ever before. In the last century, life expectancy at birth increased from 51 to 79.4 years for women and from 48 to 73.9 years for men. Infant mortality has dropped to the lowest level ever recorded. The death rates for the nation's main health threats—heart disease, cancer, and stroke—are decreasing.

These gains provide great optimism for success in tackling the increasingly complex environmental challenges that remain. We are getting better all the time at finding more effective – and far more innovative – ways to address such challenges. The Bush Administration is confident that further dramatic environmental progress can be achieved more affordably and at a quicker pace.

In EPA's short history, its work has helped transform the way America views the environment – planting in the American consciousness a clear sense of environmental stewardship. EPA has helped underscore the universal agreement that our natural resources are valuable, not just for economic prosperity, but for a sustained quality of life.

In 2002, and again this year, Representative Sherwood Boehlert of New York authored legislation to elevate EPA to a cabinet department. I would like to acknowledge and thank Representative Boehlert for his continued leadership and ongoing support for elevating EPA to a cabinet department. When I testified before this Committee on this subject in July 2002, I emphasized that the Bush Administration would work closely with the Committee to advance EPA cabinet legislation and make official what is already a reality in the Bush Administration. Let me again highlight why EPA should be elevated to a cabinet department.

EPA carries out the work of a cabinet department. EPA started out by overseeing four major environmental statutes. Today, EPA implements 15 major statutes and numerous others, as well as a full complement of grant programs, voluntary initiatives, technical assistance and educational programs, and citizen outreach throughout the nation.

EPA advances the mission of a cabinet department. As we move forward in tackling our environmental goals for the 21st century, EPA is reaching out to develop new approaches that promote stewardship, spur innovation, instill sound science in its decisions, advance federalism through greater involvement of state and local government, and ensure compliance.

EPA plays a vital role in homeland security. EPA has the lead role in environmental monitoring, decontamination and long-term site cleanup. Their expertise in off-site monitoring, contamination surveys, working with health officials to establish safe clean-up levels, conducting protective clean-up actions, and communicating technical information to citizens is essential for a Federal response to an act of terrorism that involves a release of biological, chemical, or radioactive material. EPA works with Federal partners in every phase from the initial crisis to final cleanup.

EPA produces initiatives of national significance that one expects of a cabinet department. EPA designed and is advancing the President's Clear Skies Initiative to cut the nation's power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury by 70 percent. This initiative, along with EPA's new comprehensive regulations and programs to cut emissions from diesel engines, will enable hundreds of counties to meet our newest and most stringent national air quality standards. In doing so, our states will have greater flexibility to maintain and grow jobs, even as their air quality improves dramatically. EPA's stewardship led to enactment of Brownfields legislation that President Bush signed into law to help cleanup thousands of abandoned, contaminated sites and spur renewed investment, development and jobs in often struggling communities.

EPA's influence and accomplishments now extend beyond our borders. Many nations turn to EPA for technical expertise and guidance in safeguarding the health of their citizens and the sustainable use and enjoyment of their natural resources. Our laws, regulations, and standards have been adopted by nations across the globe. Our scientific and technical expertise is respected world wide. Air pollution, global climate change, chemical use and transport, resource management, and a range of other issues are increasingly complex and global in scope.

For these reasons, the Bush Administration strongly supports elevating EPA to a cabinet department. We support efforts to accomplish this objective in a straightforward manner, and to improve the organizational structure of a new cabinet department. Acting Administrator Horinko will outline some comments and recommendations for changes to certain elements of the legislation. Overall, we believe it is important to build an organization better equipped to meet the increasingly complex environmental challenges facing the nation and the world, and an organization that will ultimately better protect public health and the environment. We look forward to continuing dialogue on how best to accomplish our mutual objectives.

In the Summer of 1970, in his supporting testimony for the creation of EPA, Russell Train, the first Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality and future EPA Administrator, gave the Agency unqualified support, predicting that its "vision of clean air and water... will provide us with the unity and the leadership necessary to protect the environment." Thirty-three years later, as the tenth Chairperson of the Council on Environmental Quality, I predict that the *Department* of Environmental Protection, with its vision of clean air and water, better protected land, and improved public health will continue to provide us with the unity and leadership necessary to protect the environment into the 21st century and beyond.